

The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 7 & Issue 6, (December, 2022)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 30th December, 2022

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

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Article History: Abstract and complete research article received on: 10 November 2022 | Revised article received: 21 November 2022 | Accepted: 19 Dec. 2022 | First Published: 30 December 2022

Research Article



Narrating Marginality: Gender Crisis in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*

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 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2022.7.6.19>

Pages: 171-176

Abstract

Feminine sensibilities and gender issues are based on different cultures and diasporic essence. The desire and aspirations of women of different countries are not similar. Their demands are influenced by a number of variables, including familial, societal/racial, marital, economic, cultural, and personal ones. It is considered incorrect to compare Indian feminism to western feminism, which is characterised by radical rules, in such a varied culture. In its early stages, Indian feminism was wholly liberal and addressed every facet of mankind. There hasn't been a significant political or social uprising in India against the male-dominated culture. In beginning, they seek to address the inequality and dissimilarity that existed between males and females. They desired to bridge the gaps between men and women through their social revolt and provide the psychological reason for the male violence against women. Some feminist intellectuals extended the gender issues focusing the intention on rape and other forms of sexual violence. To them, such gender issues of exploitation are because of the male dominant society. They agree with Liberal feminists that material change and patriarchy is the sole reason for women's discrimination. They argue against the existing tradition of love, marriage, and gender inequality and demand equal social rights. The women writers like Shashi Deshpande have used fiction to explore and share their experiences. The myriad conflicts, which they face in everyday lives, are woven into the fictional world of their creation. To Shashi Deshpande, traditional beliefs also play a major role in female discrimination.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Gender issues, Race, Ethnicity, Civilization, Western culture, Diaspora, Marginality, Violence, Exploitation

In the Karnataka province of Dharwad, Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938. She was the daughter of playwright and author Sriranga and was raised in a well-known Kannada family. She completed her schooling in law and education at Bangalore and Bombay. She also completed a journalism course at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan in Bombay and spent some time working as a journalist for the well-known publication Onlooker. One of the most well-known female authors in India, she is renowned for her social novels that tackle gender-based concerns. *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terror* are two of her best-known books. Her books depict a social milieu of relationships and Indian middle-class women. In her novels, one will find women and their aspirations in search of self, individual identity, and relationships with male-oriented society. As a feminist, she deals sensitive nature of women, sympathetic instinct, gentleness, and beliefs in non-violence. She deals central vision of life through reconciliation and harmony between men and women. She has also a vision of complete change in the male-oriented public sphere. Darwinism had an impact on well-known American author and sociology writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. A few critics blame her that as a woman writer, she writes in a biased tone and unnecessarily creates hype around gender issues. But one cannot deny the fact that due to differences in 'gendering', men and women are bound to adopt different characteristics and modes of feeling and

temperament. According to Gilligan, a woman's perspective could be different if she is the one observing. Even Virginia Woolf makes observations about the differences in writing between men and women; "It is probable, however, that both in life and in art, the values of women are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel. . . to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important" (Virginia Woolf 81).

Shashi Deshpande has used fiction to explore and share their experiences. The myriad conflicts, which they face in everyday lives, are woven into the fictional world of their creation. In their writings, she talks about the ideals of Indian womanhood. The gender issues raised by Shashi Deshpande resist the presence of sexism, male domination, and patriarchy. In India, gender discrimination against women starts at birth or even earlier. It begins in the mother's womb, before the child is even born. Daughters are not mentioned in any of the traditional blessings bestowed upon a pregnant lady. In India, a woman is made to feel as though having a son is her moral duty. People frequently snicker at families with multiple daughters; "poor things, they'd been trying so hard for a son but all God seemed to have given them is daughters".

Almost all known civilizations have this desire for a male kid, and it has taken on varied degrees of strength and significance over the course of human history. It is omnipresent in modern India in a historical and sociocultural context. It emphasises the constant rarities of social existence and manifests in the most basic cycle possible. The present novel of Shashi Deshpande *Dark Holds No Terrors* is also a story of Sarita (Saru), an urban working woman belonging to the middle class who is oppressed at all levels including domestic, professional, and marital levels and she seems to have lost her control over her own life. During childhood, she is told that she is an *ammanat* of the other house and thus she grows up with the feeling that she will own her own house when she gets married. There are four members in her family including her. Sarita is the protagonist and narrator of the story. There are her parents and a brother. Her mother, Kamala Tai, is a typical traditional Indian woman, who has a gender-based discriminating tendency in her nature. She offers less importance to her daughter than her son, Dhruva. Her daughter faces many problems because of her gender. From her childhood, she started a fight against the male dominance mindset. She bears all the domestic responsibilities along with taking care of her career-oriented growth. She married, as a runaway girl against the wishes of her parents. In her many acts of violation of societal norms, Sarita defies her parents by studying medicine and becoming a doctor. But she receives a heartbreaking jolt when she gets married and goes to her husband's house and finally, realizes that she has no place of her own. She only learns about Sita and Savitri when she is young, and she is instructed to imitate them in order to make the perfect wife. She only has an identity as a wife and a mother. Her entire being is focused on pleasing her spouse and getting pregnant for him. According to Alison M. Jagger;

With the partial exception of mothers, the male culture defines women as sexual objects for male pleasure... As a daughter and as a wife, a woman's sexuality is

carefully controlled so that she may not bring dishonor to her family. (Alison M. Jagger 1983)

Sarita narrates a man-woman relationship from a feminine point of view. She tells how her husband; Manohar feels jealous to see her increasing popularity as a good doctor. He becomes a patient with an inferiority complex. He starts to exploit her physically, mentally, and socially to represent himself as a superior husband. Sarita finds herself unable to face such heinous behavior of her husband. And finally, she left her husband and took shelter in her father's house and started a fight against patriarchy.

Shashi Deshpande understands and lives within the Indian socio-cultural milieu, and has projected the feelings and emotions of Indian women in universal colors. She universalizes certain basic feelings irrespective of national characters and makes it plain that a woman must develop the thinking because she is an individual who is capable enough of withstanding trials and tribulations in life all alone. The modern Indian woman should be evaluated more than a mother, sister, or daughter. A woman needs a strong mind, individual will, and identity. She opines that there is a great need for economic capability and education for women to achieve values, money, power, and social identity. In short, the new woman has to accept the responsibility for her children, her husband, and the duties of the lady of the house. This vision also was in the mind of the central character, Sarita who arrives at a point of realization wherein nothing either becomes a problem or reveals any darkness. Her search for identity leads to revealing the power of individuality. Therefore, she brings out emphatically psychological and emotional problems as Indian working women to solve them. When we read Shashi Deshpande's work *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, we discover that it has a strong plot and that it supports Simone de Beauvoir's claim that a woman is not born but rather is transformed into one. Beauvoir thinks that this feminine-described creature, the woman, is a product of society. However, Shashi Deshpande's novel is different from the feminist works of the West which present male protagonists providing secondary roles to women. However, Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are women who ponder over their situations and their relation to others.

Unlike many Indian women novelists, Shashi Deshpande talks about the biased attitude of parents in upbringing a girl child. Though this attitudinal story contests. She rewrote this story about seventeen times issue is universal in tone, yet the voices heard are Indian, particularly in her *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. One cannot fairly expect anything less from a novelist who was profoundly influenced by Jane Austen's work and still likes revisiting her books. Her debut book, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is based on her observation. From beginning to end, the story of the novel reflects an exploitation of the protagonist Sarita (Saru). She survives a small-town upbringing, a domineering mother, a jealous husband, and a failing marriage. She finally realizes that there is more to life than depending on her husband, family members, parents, and social traditions. Very dexterously, she faces silence, loss, confusion, disappointment, and silent cruelties of the married life of this claustrophobic woman, Sarita. The author of the novel tells the tale of a career lady who experienced emotional abuse from her mother as a youngster and is currently experiencing

sexual abuse from her spouse. In doing so, the novelist brings several gender issues into context to the Indian patriarchal system on the surface.

Shashi Deshpande makes a caustic attack on the Indian patriarchal system in which a girl-child faces parental rejection only for the reason that she was born as a girl and that too because of no fault of hers. Saru's relationship with her brother has been given special treatment. She is not given any importance and is always ignored in favor of her brother, Dhruva-no ceremony for her but no occasion is missed to celebrate Dhruva (her brother), be it his birthday or his naming ceremony. When Saru was young, he was sold the legend of the mythical Dhruva, who was forced off his father's lap and dedicated himself over to unwavering meditation, becoming the unchanging North Star. One day, Saru pulls Dhruva off her father's lap in an act of infantile logic to see if he will also become a star like a mythical Dhruva. If she had been a son, then this incident would have been told and retold to the relatives and acquaintances with the vestige of a smile but she was unfairly punished for this action of hers as if she had committed a major crime. This discrimination does not stop here only. It recurs annually in the form of birthday celebrations of Dhruva. There was always joyous excitement in the house on the occasion of Dhruva's birthday. His birthdays are celebrated with much fanfare and performance of religious rites but her birthdays lack all the religious rites. Later, after the death of Dhruva, her birthdays go unacknowledged. Sarita has heard of other local women who lived neglected lives but did not rebel against the neglect or attempt to change their circumstances. She was informed that her grandmother's spouse had left her after only a few years of marriage. She observes how husbands are viewed as showpieces and possessions. She recalls the lunch gathering she had with Manohar when they visited a friend and had lunch together. Manohar began humming a melody as they returned home from lunch, demonstrating how pleased he was. She thought that getting a better status in society would be a source of relief, but she eventually found that it was actually complacency. She had also grown to be seen as a prized property and a source of pride. Sarita's psyche was deeply ingrained with all the aforementioned examples of Manohar's exploitation. She believed that male chauvinism was to blame for women generally leading deplorable lives.

She saw that women in every social class had to put up with abuse and humiliation. She feared that she might experience the same result. Even though she was aware that her father had helped her despite her mother's desires, she struggled with the question of whether he was fighting for her or against her, or whether he was using her as a weapon against her. If he used her as a weapon, everything would be different. Instead of being aided, a woman would be used by a man, and a daughter would take advantage of her mother. Instead of being helped, it would mean a woman's exploitation by a man and a daughter's exploitation of her mother. If that were the case, she would feel resentment toward her father since he had taken advantage of her daughter.

In her work, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande has, in brief, addressed gender-based issues. She has demonstrated how marriage and men cause women to suffer. In addition to outlining her own experiences as a woman, she thoroughly examines society. She has demonstrated that even though she has economic independence and education. Away

from reality, women are perceived to be denied legal protections outside the home and to be victims of domestic abuse. The entire book tackles the gender-based issue that is pervasive in our culture.

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